

Wildfire Preparedness Update

Los Alamos Office of Emergency Management

April 2003

How To Prepare For Wildfire Season

The lack of snowfall this year and the ongoing drought in the southwestern U.S. tell us once again that this year's wildfire season is likely to be severe. While there is no indication that another major wildfire is imminent this spring, the Los Alamos County Office of Emergency Management and Interagency Wildfire Management Team (IWMT) encourage residents to begin preparing for the wildfire season. In particular, LAC/OEM and IWMT recommend that all County residents be ready to evacuate if another large fire threatens the area. Also, be very careful this spring with grills, lit cigarettes and any other ignition sources. Please do not use fireworks or light campfires!

Please note that mass evacuations are seldom ordered except during large-scale disasters that provide advance warning, such as hurricanes and wildfires. Most emergencies are best dealt with by sheltering in place. Therefore, it is best not to evacuate your home unless you are asked to do so by the Fire Department, Police Department or Emergency Management, or there is advance notice of an impending emergency and you wish to voluntarily and safely leave. Evacuation notices will be first broadcast via telephone and cable, and through local radio KRSN - 1490 AM.

You can prepare for the wildfire season by taking the following steps:

- Assemble an evacuation supplies kit; suggestions are available on the reverse side or at: <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/evacuation.pdf>
- Take the time to ensure that insurance policies are up-to-date and provide adequate coverage.
- Inventory your household items with a camcorder or camera. This will help in settling insurance claims in the event of a disaster or burglary. Collect receipts for items if available.
- Assemble all important papers and documents, such as mortgage or lease papers, insurance policies, financial papers, marriage licenses, birth certificates, passports, wills, prescriptions, etc. Keep them in a separate envelope or lockbox for easy transport if you are evacuated.
- Make sure essential medical equipment (O2 bottles, walkers, etc.) and medications are ready to go in case of an evacuation.
- Collect any irreplaceable items and mementos and prepare to take them with you.
- If possible, arrange in advance to stay in an alternate location such as with friends or relatives outside of Los Alamos County.
- If your pets cannot stay with you in the alternate location, make arrangements to have them boarded and taken care of elsewhere (pets are not allowed in Red Cross shelters).
- If wildfires are reported near the County, ensure that your car is well-maintained and that the fuel tank is full. You may wish to park in a location (e.g., on the street) that allows a quick exit or back your car into the garage.
- Make plans with your family to reunite if a disaster occurs or an evacuation is ordered while everyone is away at work or school. Have a friend or relative outside of the County serve as a point of contact that all family members can call to leave messages and receive information about other family members. Ensure that all family members know the contact's number.

If an evacuation is ordered, please follow all official instructions and leave immediately.

- Make sure your home is locked and secured before you leave.
- Don't turn off gas or electricity to your home - it will delay your exit, and the Utilities Department will turn off any utilities necessary for public safety.
- Please take all pets with you! Don't assume that it will be safe to return in a few hours.
- Check in with family members and your employer when you have arrived at your destination - they may need to reach you and can contact others to let them know that you are OK.
- Listen to local media or check the laboratory and County websites to see if it is safe to return. If a major incident has occurred, a Public Information Center will be activated, which you can contact by phone to get current information. Check local media outlets and websites for numbers.

Essential supplies for your evacuation kit:

- Flashlight & radio with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Medications with copies of prescriptions
- Extra eyeglasses & contact lenses
- Bottled water (at least 1 gallon/person)
- Supply of nonperishable foods and snacks
- Special items for infants & seniors
- Change of clothes for each family member
- Sleeping bag or bedroll and pillow for each family member
- Checkbook, credit card & cash
- Map or road atlas of the area

Make your home resistant to wildfire

One of the most important steps you can take this wildfire season is to make your home more resistant to fire. You can do this through the following measures:

- Install fire-retardant siding and roofing on your home. The expense is worthwhile.
- Clear brush and vegetation away from your home. Ensure that nothing ignitable is in contact with the structure, especially overhanging tree branches or vines against walls.
- Clean your roof and gutters, removing leaves and pine needles. Also clean leaves and trash from under any structures. Rake up and dispose of all pine needles, leaves and dead grasses in your yard.
- Keep woodpiles away from the building. These can ignite and catch adjacent objects on fire.
- Place 1/2-inch mesh screening around decks, porches, vents, and over the chimney to prevent smoldering embers from entering, and have your chimney cleaned regularly.
- Consider installing double-paned windows and heavy solid doors for added fire resistance.
- During the fire season, keep flammable items like curtains and furniture away from windows where they may be ignited by heat radiating through the glass.
- Create a buffer zone of **defensible space** around your home in which vegetation has been thinned. Prune trees near the ground to prevent ground fires from climbing into tree crowns.

For more information on wildfire preparedness or defensible space, contact the Fire Department (662-8301) or the local U.S. Forest Service office (667-5120) or visit <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/fire.pdf>.

Information on emergency preparedness can be obtained from the local Red Cross chapter (662-7165).